

# Notes on British Grasses

By MARTIN H. F. SUTTON  
*Great Britain's most eminent seed specialist*

THE principal grasses of Great Britain are bents (*Agrostis*) and fescues. They are found on all classes of soil and mingle freely to form a fine, dense turf. The noted "fescue turf" of Britain is largely a mixture of English bent and red fescue.

The English bent is quite a distinct grass from Rhode Island bent, and so far as we are aware has never been established in the United States. It is similar in turf habit to the American bents and can be propagated in the vegetative manner. This method of establishment, however, is hardly necessary as English bent produces good, fertile seed.



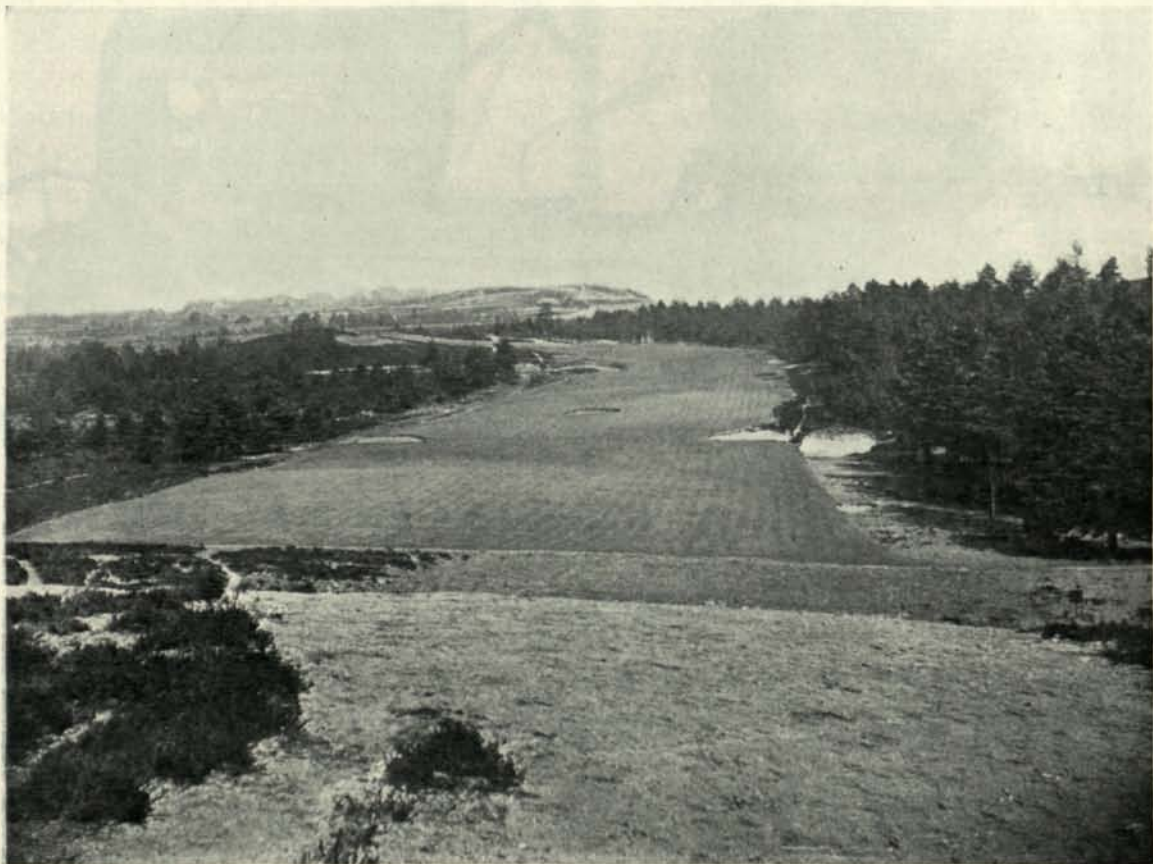
MR. MARTIN H. F. SUTTON

English bent contributes to some of the finest natural turf in Great Britain and is common on putting greens throughout the country. Its most valuable features are a pronouncedly creeping character, dwarf foliage under mowing, and a capability of withstanding drought and hard wear.

At present, the botanical *Agrostis vulgaris* is assigned to English bent, but it is really so distinct in habit from Rhode Island bent or European *Agrostis* as to deserve distinct classification. The supply is at present very limited.

## **Brown Bent**

This grass often forms a considerable pro-



THE 10TH HOLE ON THE SUNNINGDALE GOLF COURSE

portion of the herbage of British heathland courses. It is closely related to English bent but in texture of foliage is more comparable with red fescue. Brown bent has lower leaves which are needle-like, and produces a beautifully fine sward. It can be propagated by the vegetative method, but the rate of creeping in this country is relatively slow.

#### Fiorin, or Red Top

Unlike the other bent grasses, this species is quite unsuited for use on putting greens, but it is found to some extent on damp fairways in Britain.

#### Chewings Fescue

*(Known commercially in Europe as Red Fescue)*

Without doubt the most valuable of all fescues and one of the most important grasses on British golf courses. The climate of that country is peculiarly suitable for its development and it thrives on all classes of soil from sand to heavy loam. The true red fescue is quite distinct from other fine-leaved fescues and has the advantage of a creeping habit.

Occasionally some beautiful stretches of pure

red fescue turf are found in Britain, but more often it is associated with English bent. The best golfing turf in Great Britain is composed of these two varieties.

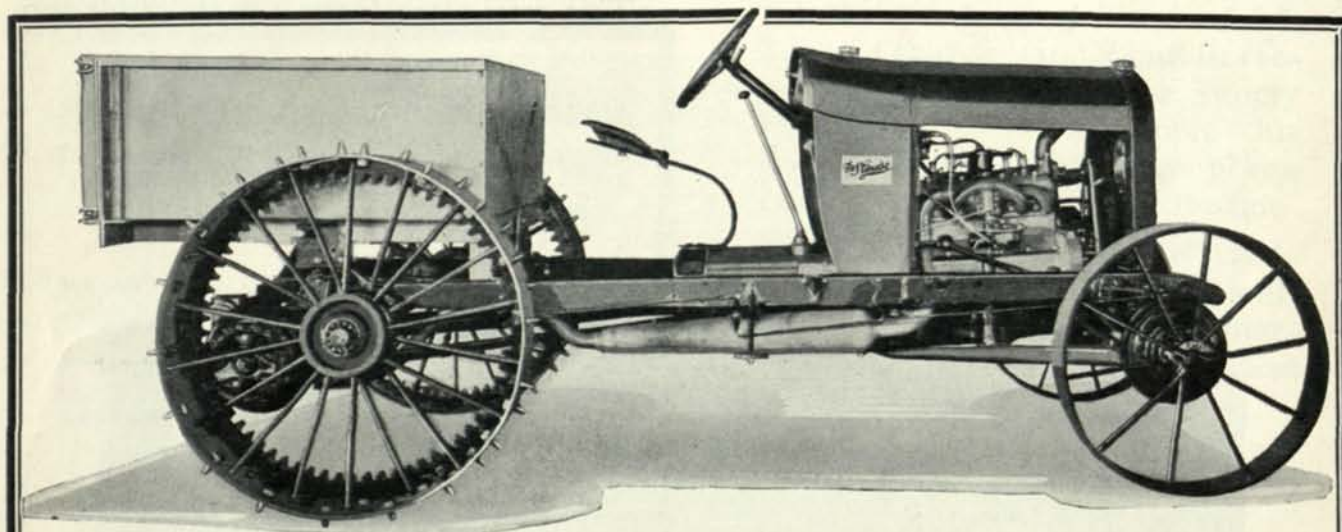
#### Sheep's Fescue

A common variety on the chalk downs of England and the Scotch highlands. It contributes largely to the beautiful turf down which is the pride of a number of English Clubs.

Sheep's fescue has penetrating roots and retains its vivid green color, even in dry weather. It is totally distinct from other fescues, and true seed is difficult to obtain. A very great deal of that offered in Great Britain as sheep's fescue is nothing more than hard fescue.

#### Fine-Leaved Fescue

Differs only slightly from sheep's fescue. It generally grows in smaller and more compact tufts and has shorter and more needle-like leaves. Fine-leaved fescue is found on the poor, rock soils of Britain. Although unable alone to form a smooth turf it proves of con-



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siderable value as a constituent of putting greens in these situations.

#### Hard Fescue

Perhaps the best known of British fescues and particularly valued for its power to stand constant wear. For this reason it is often seen on British tees. Mingled in due proportion with other sorts, it is present to some extent on putting greens in Britain, but is not nearly so widely distributed as red fescue or sheep's fescue.

The leaves of hard fescue are generally stouter and are of a bluish green color, as distinct from the other fescues.

#### Wavy Hair Grass

A species often present in abundance on the drying heathlands of Britain, where it contributes to the formation of a really excellent turf. To the casual observer wavy hair grass appears indistinguishable from the fescues, but the presence of a well-developed ligule is sufficient to identify this grass, as in the case of the fescues the ligule is much reduced or entirely absent.

But for the fact that it germinates very indifferently seed of wavy hair grass would be in great demand for sowing on British golf courses.

#### Crested Dogstail

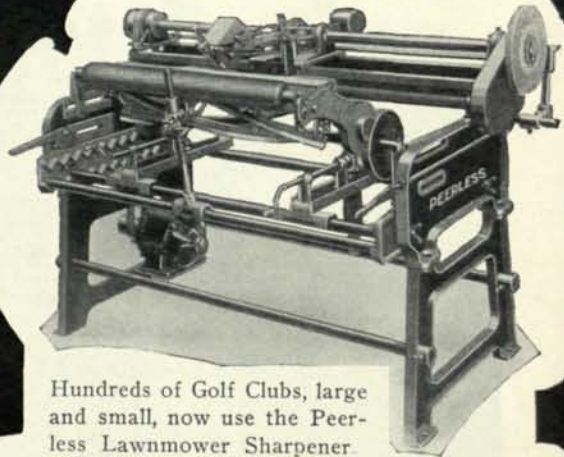
An important constituent of the turf on the chalk soils of Britain. It sometimes appears in putting greens and forms a compact turf, provided the ground is well filled with the plants and they are more or less crowded together. Crested dogstail, however, is essentially a fairway grass, as the leaf blades are somewhat wide. Like hard fescue it will stand a lot of wear and is a grass that is valuable for tees.

The foliage of crested dogstail is compact and remains green for an unusual time in the absence of rain. The roots are capable of penetrating the soil to a considerable depth and the plant is well adapted for the dry chalk loams upon which it is commonly found.

#### Smooth-stalked Meadow Grass

The American Kentucky Blue Grass. It grows extensively on the light, well drained soils of Britain and is beautifully compact in habit. With ordinary care it never becomes

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coarse and would, therefore, find favor as a constituent of putting turf. Smooth-stalked meadow grass, however, is not found to any considerable extent on British greens as very close cutting does not appear to suit it and it suffers in consequence from competition by the rather more suitable bents and fescues.

#### **Rough-stalked Meadow Grass**

Is somewhat similar in appearance to smooth-stalked meadow grass, but instead of being adapted to dry, light soils it flourishes in strong, moist situations. On British fairways where the soil is at all heavy, rough-stalked meadow grass forms a useful constituent of the herbage. In color it is particularly bright and green, invariably looks fresh and has the merit of flourishing under trees or in shady spots.

With smooth-stalked meadow grass, it shares the dislike of being very closely mown and is not, therefore, seen to any great degree on British greens.

#### **Wood Meadow Grass**

Shares with rough-stalked meadow grass a taste for shady situations and is, therefore, found to some extent on British greens which do not enjoy much sunshine. The foliage is particularly fine and of a perpetual greenness.

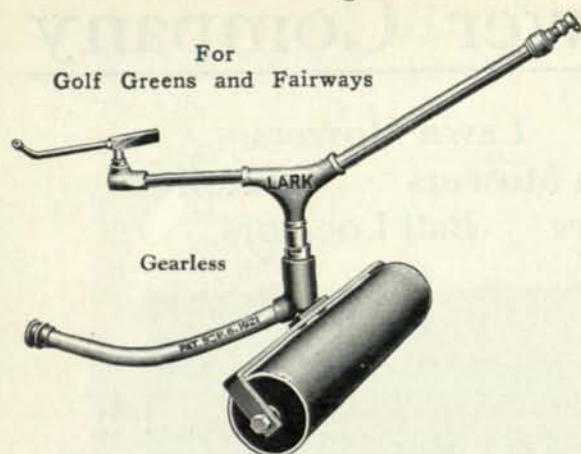
#### **Annual Meadow Grass**

This species is usually looked upon as a troublesome weed, but in situations where other grasses do not thrive annual meadow grass often forms the bulk of the herbage on British greens. While it is only a short-lived variety, it is capable of maintaining a turf by reason of its remarkable power of seeding at almost every period of the year.

Annual meadow grass is not altogether to be despised as with a little extra care and attention it is possible to make good greens of it, even if the turf is rather sensitive to weather conditions. It must be confessed, however, that annual meadow grass is rather more widely distributed in British greens than is really de-

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sirable and often this is due to mismanagement as much as poor soil conditions.

### Perennial Rye Grass

Perennial rye grass is perhaps the best known British grass, if not the most widely distributed on English courses. On loam or clay soil it forms a considerable proportion of the fairway herbage and for this purpose it is a useful variety. Under suitable conditions the herbage is excellent in color and retains its verdure throughout the year unless burned by excessive drought.

The general habit of perennial rye grass makes it essentially a variety for the fairway and it never finds a place on British greens.

The divergence of opinion which exists as to the merits of perennial rye grass for British fairways is undoubtedly due to the extraordinary variation in the habit of this plant according to the class of land upon which it is sown. On certain soils perennial rye grass gets quite out of hand and exhibits an objectionable tendency to coarseness, which makes it unsuitable even for fairways.